

Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski

Marina El-Alamein: Excavation Report 2002

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MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

EXCAVATION REPORT 2002

Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski

The month long campaign was carried out by the Polish Archaeological Mission in March in the Western Necropolis and in the town center.¹⁾ In the necropolis the investigation concentrated in a few tomb-hypogea. In the town center the excavations were carried out on the east and west sides of the main square.

1) The team was directed by Prof. Dr. Wiktor A. Daszewski and comprised: Mrs. Iwona Zych, Miss Edyta Knapik, Mr. Nicola Geeraert, archaeologists and Mr. Artur Blaszczyk, architect. Aleksandra, Mrs. Zych's daughter, helped out during her school vacations.

The SCA was represented, efficiently as usual, by Mr. Abd el Latif el Wakil, Director of the Region. The Mission also wishes to express its gratitude to Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the SCA, for his personal interest and help.

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN
EGYPT

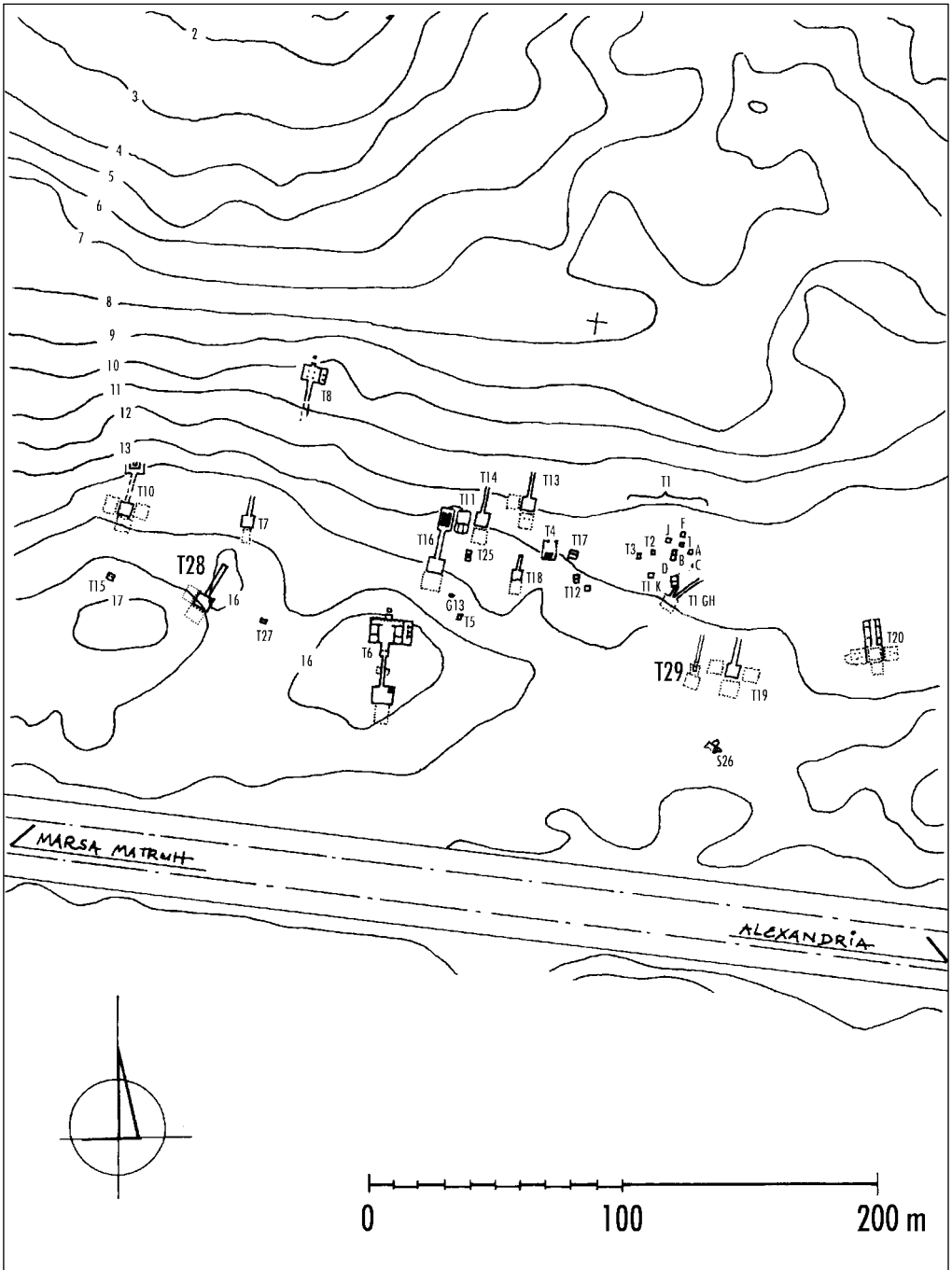


Fig. 1. Plan of the necropolis in Marina, state at the end of the season in 2002
(Drawing Polish Archaeological Mission Marina el-Alamein)

NECROPOLIS

TOMB 29

The presence of a tomb-hypogeum was noted last year in the course of leveling works at the planned location of the new museum building.²⁾ It was situated in the southern part of the necropolis, parallel to Tomb 19, about 12 m to the west of it (*Fig. 1*).

The tomb was relatively well preserved except for the entrance kiosk and the curtain wall aboveground (*Fig. 2*). The tomb must have been plundered in the

past, perhaps already in Antiquity, but quite possibly in more recent times, if a rusty iron nail, which appears to be of modern manufacture, uncovered on floor level in the southeastern corner of the funerary chamber is to be taken as testimony.

The tomb is of simple type. A small entrance kiosk (L. 2.40; W. 2.20 m) now almost completely destroyed led to the hypogeum down a staircase (L. 11.90 m;

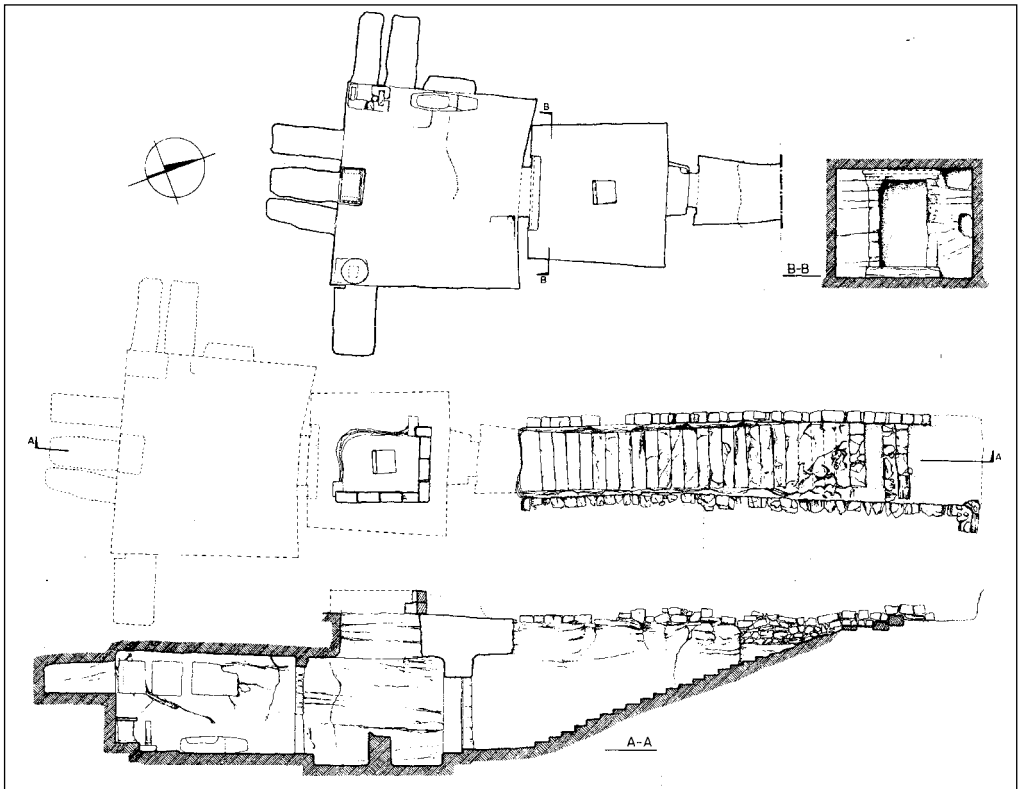


Fig. 2. Tomb 29. Plan, section, views
(Drawing A. Błaszczyk)

2) Supervised by Mr. Abd el Latif el Wakil. The tomb was located through a small hole that appeared in the ceiling of the funerary chamber in the course of bulldozing work. Photographs of the interior were taken with a digital camera by Dr. Andrzej B. Biernacki of the Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission to Marina el-Alamein. A new site, further north, close to the lagoon, was eventually approved by the SCA for the location of the museum.

W. 1.79 - 1.55 - 1.75m). Both must have been continuously roofed once. The lower end of the staircase consisted of a landing closed with a wooden door (0.93 m wide and 1.93 m high) separating the staircase from the court. The original door was not preserved but the holes for the wooden door jambs were cut in the rock. The threshold was 0.30 m above the court.

The open-air court (3.90 x 3.70 m) was some 4.80 m high, including the preserved

lower course of blocks of the curtain wall. The overhanging roof in the courtyard protruded 0.80-1.00 m on the north side and 0.75-0.80 m on the south side. The opening over the courtyard was thus approximately 2 m (N-S) and 1.50 m (E-W). A rock-cut altar, almost square in plan (0.60 x 0.65 m; 0.80-0.88 high), dominated the center of the courtyard, right underneath the roof opening (Figs. 3, 4). Opposite the staircase, in the middle of the south wall,

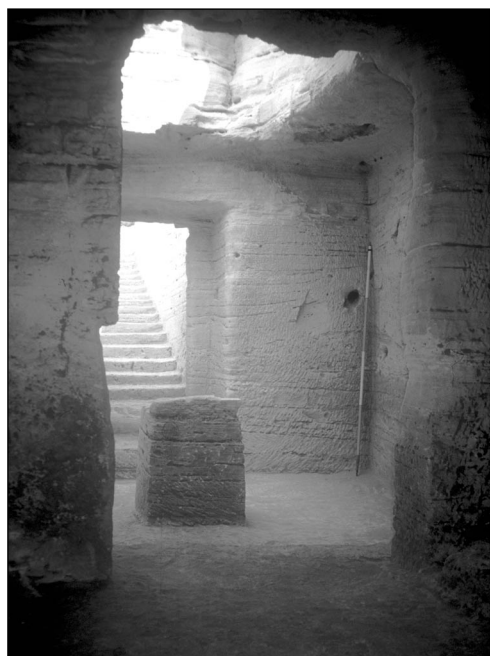


Fig. 3. Tomb 29. Altar in the courtyard and entrance staircase, view from the south (Photo W.A. Daszewski)



Fig. 4. Tomb 29. Entrance to the burial chamber, altar in the courtyard in the foreground, view from the north (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

3) Loculus 1 in the east wall (W: 0.76, H: 0.81, L: 1.91) contained four bodies in fairly correct anatomical position with heads resting on flat stones and the bones of two earlier burials removed to the southeast corner. South-wall loculi from east to west: no. 2 (W: 0.67, H: 0.87, L: 2.0-2.5) with an adult and child; no. 3 (W: 0.81, H: 0.87-0.94, L: 1.95) with two adults, resting with heads in opposite directions, one to the north and the other to the south, in a wooden coffin; no. 4 (W: 0.75, H: 0.90, L: 2.0) with two adults, the original burial having been pushed aside towards the east wall and the second one lying on the west side among fragments of wooden planks (bier). West wall loculi: southernmost no. 5 (W: 0.7, H: 0.87, L: 2.05) with a single male skeleton; no. 6 (W: 0.82, H: 0.92, L: 2.0) with one burial amidst traces of a wooden bier or coffin and a rectangular mummy label of bone, the inscription totally faded; no. 7, cut sideways (W: 1.16, H: 0.80, L: 0.40), holding a child burial, the head pointing north.

opened a monumental entrance (H. 2.37; W. 1.33 m) giving access to the funerary chamber. Flanking it were pilasters topped with capitals supporting a lintel, all hewn in bedrock. The funerary chamber was accessed by a step up, 0.30 m high.

The chamber (5.50 x 5.10 m and 2.60-2.95 m high) contained seven burial niches, six of which were approximately 2 m long, 0.70-0.80 m wide and 0.80-0.90 m high, hewn on the same level in the upper part of the east, south and west walls.³⁾ In one of them, loculus 3, on the back wall, there were two symmetric cobra heads painted on either side of a sun disk (*Fig. 5*). Three loculi occupied the central part of the southern wall; one had been cut in the south end of the eastern wall and the remaining three in the west wall.

It should be noted that the loculi were placed at a fixed height using a predefined grid, drafted in red on the wall. Not always has the grid been preserved, but the extant lines, e.g. on the east wall, allow the overall pattern to be reconstructed. It consists of two horizontal rows of five cells each, one above the other, separated by a horizontal



Fig. 5. Tomb 29. Loculus 3 containing a burial in a wooden coffin. The painted disk with cobras on either side visible on the back wall (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

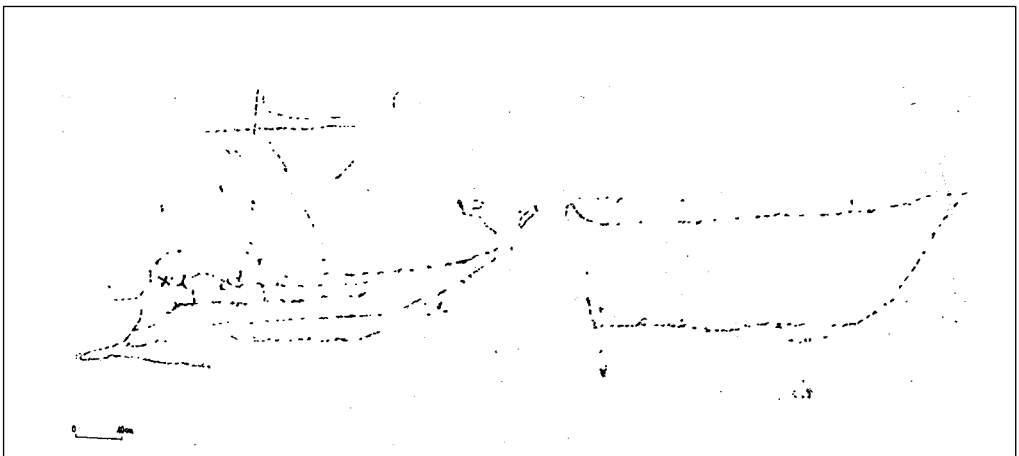


Fig. 6. Tomb 29. Ships drawn in charcoal on the east wall of the burial chamber (Drawing E. Knapik)

band c. 0.30 m wide. Loculi were in principle 0.70-0.77 m wide and separated by partitions 0.28 m wide.

Interestingly, two ships were drawn in black charcoal on the east wall (*Fig. 6*), more or less in the band between the two rows of drafted loculi. One of the ships, drawn very cursorily, is probably a large cargo vessel. The other seems to be a faster ship, probably a galley. It has a pointed prow, curving back at the top. It was probably decorated. Along the sides there was probably a row of oars. The galley ship was in use both in the Hellenistic period and in Early Imperial times.⁴⁾

Three offering tables had been placed in front of the loculi (*Fig. 7*). A round one had a wide top (wider on the upper surface,

with a diameter 0.725 m and 0.14 m thick). It was probably set up on a square leg, but two smaller stones found lying nearby may have been used just as well. The table stood in the southeastern corner not far from the east wall. A rectangular table in the middle of the south wall (*Fig. 8*) had a wide molded top (the plain strap edges were 3.5 /3.8 cm at front, the molded band was 2.2-2.5 cm wide) that was 0.96 m long, 0.56 m wide and some 0.125 m thick. It was supported on two legs carved in the front with a flat foot and a widening upper part, measuring 0.62 m high, 0.17 m wide and 0.36 m deep. These rested on a low rectangular podium measuring 1.01 m long in the front, 0.63-0.65 m wide and 0.21 m high with its



Fig. 7. Tomb 29. View of the burial chamber after exploration, the offering tables standing in place (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

4) L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (1971); *RE* XIII, 1, 143ff s.v. *Liburna*; also Kleine Pauly, 3, 627.

stone leveling fill. From floor to top of molding, the table was 0.95 m high. Yet another rectangular table with carved legs (0.66 m high and 0.14 m wide) and a base (0.14 m wide) was found in the south-western corner of the chamber. Its top, probably of the same kind as the one from the south wall, was missing.

Slabs that had once closed some of the loculi were found broken. One of these slabs (0.33 m high and 0.23 m wide) bears a fairly poor relief decoration in the form of a bird, probably a Horus falcon in frontal view (0.37 m high and 0.12 m wide) (*Fig. 9*). A large terracotta sarcophagus of tubular shape, larger in the middle and narrower at both ends, lay on the ground along the western wall (*Fig. 10*). It measured 1.83 m long and its diameters were: 0.45 m at the most in the center, 0.43 m at the top and 0.29 m at the bottom end. It was provided with a rectangular lid, cut from the body of the sarcophagus before

firing, fitted into an opening 0.99 m long and 0.34 m wide, through which the corpse was introduced. The sarcophagus was not decorated apart from three protruding ribbed loops (0.025-0.030 m wide), one at the wide end, two in the center. The upper, wider end was closed with a round knobbed lid.

Two horned altars made of limestone were found near the southern wall. The first was square (H. 0.29 m; 0.16 m at the bottom; 0.15 m at the top), the second one with a rounded column supported a square top (H. 0.29 m).

Small finds were scarce, being limited to a terracotta oil lamp of Late Hellenistic/Early Roman type, well known from Alexandria, probably of the 1st century AD. It was found in the SE corner on the floor of the chamber. In the court, a fragment of CS plate, form 11, of the late 1st century AD was uncovered on floor level, while an amphora, most likely of Cretan

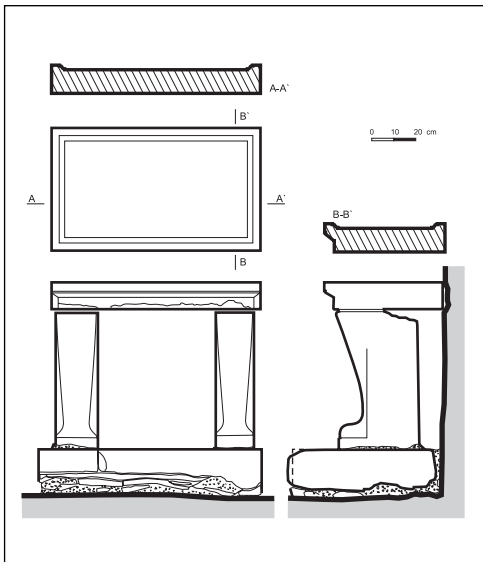


Fig. 8. Tomb 29. Rectangular offering table (Drawing M. Puzkarski after I. Zych)

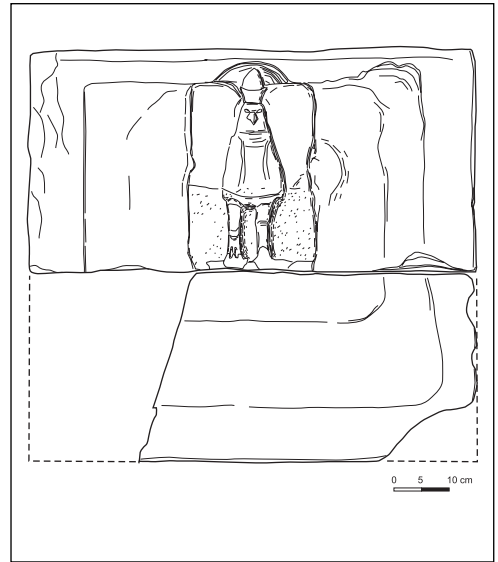


Fig. 9. Tomb 29. Relief of Horus falcon (?) on the closing slab of a loculus (Drawing M. Puzkarski after I. Zych)

origin, probably of the 1st century AD, was found in the sand fill, some 10-15 cm above the floor of the court.

The tomb belongs to the early series of hypogea uncovered in Marina. It shares some features with the neighboring tombs T 19 and T 1GH⁵⁾ (offering tables, type of open-air court) and should be assigned to the same period, i.e., the end of the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD.

TOMB 28

The architectural documentation (plan and section) of the tomb, which was some 26 m

long, including the arched ceiling staircase, open-air court with square altars and the two funerary chambers, was completed this season (*Fig. 11*).⁶⁾

TOMB 6

The aboveground mausoleum was cleared of debris and sand all along the front side and parts of the side walls on the east and west. The tomb now clearly dominates the necropolis. In front of the mausoleum, on the same level as the altar, several whole and fragmentary bottles of beer and red wine of Egyptian origin were found, dating

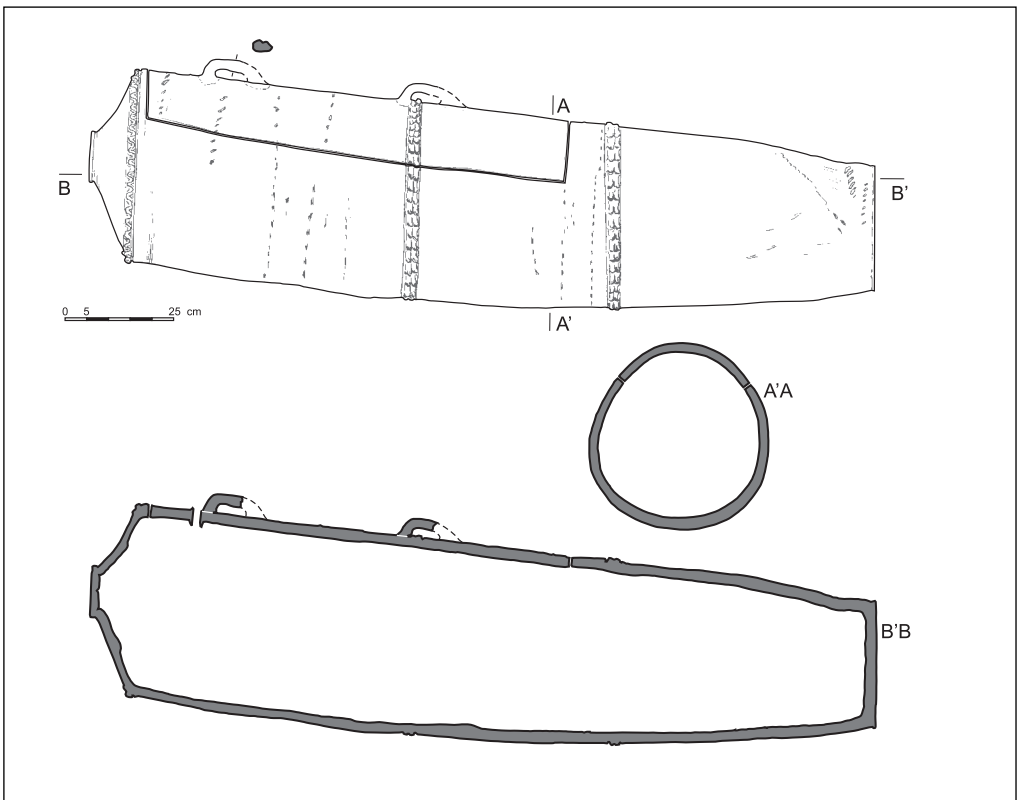


Fig. 10. Tomb 29. Terracotta sarcophagus, section and view (Drawing M. Puzkarski after I. Zych)

5) W.A. Daszewski, *PAM II Reports 1990* (1991), 27-31.

6) For a detailed description, see id., *PAM XII Reports 2000* (2001), 56-58; id., *PAM XIII Reports 2001* (2002), 75-78.

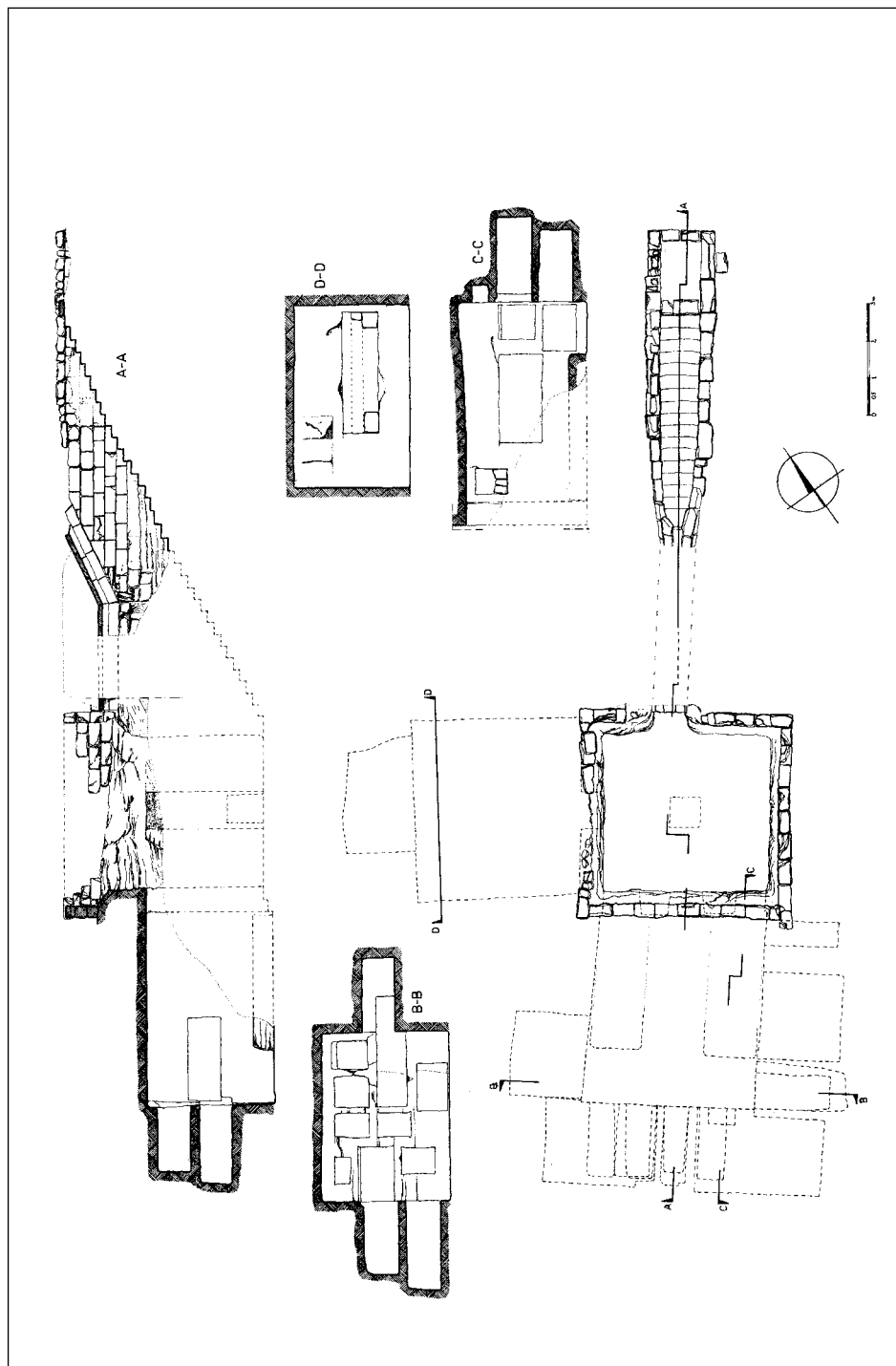


Fig. 11. Tomb 28. Plan and sections
(Drawing *M. Smola & A. Błaszczyk*)

from the 1940s and probably left behind by soldiers fighting in the Battle of El-Alamein during World War II (Fig. 12).

The small funerary chamber on the western side of the staircase was reopened in view of examining once again the remains of a young man, whose portrait was found there previously and removed to the Greco-Roman Museum at Alexandria.⁷⁾ Dr. Caroline Wilkinson of the University of Manchester prepared a plaster cast of the skull for the purpose of reconstructing the face to be later compared with the existing portrait (Fig. 13).⁸⁾



Fig. 12. Wine and beer bottles from World War II found near Tomb 6 (Photo W.A. Daszewski)



Fig. 13. Caroline Wilkinson preparing a cast of the skull of the Marina Mummy (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

7) Id., *PAM III Reports* 1991 (1992), 34f; id., *PAM IV Reports* 1992 (1993), 28.

8) Cf. contribution by C. Wilkinson in this volume.

TOWN CENTRE

In the town center, where excavations in the previous two seasons had started uncovering the main square paved with flagstones,⁹⁾ work now concentrated in three areas: the southeastern corner of the porticoes, the area behind the back wall of the eastern portico and the area in the west end of the square (Figs. 14, 15; cf. also 20).

In the corner where the southern and eastern porticoes meet, at the east end of the south portico, excavations uncovered a fallen wall of dressed limestone blocks, obviously toppled in consequence of a heavy earthquake (Fig. 16). Many of these blocks still guarded fairly regular rows and reciprocal connections. They were cleared of sand and left *in situ*, ready for anastylosis. Two Ionic columns were found among the blocks, the shafts still bearing large sections of lime plaster with regular fluting – narrow listels separating the convex flutes (Fig. 17). (The same type of plaster finishing had been observed upon the columns of the east portico uncovered the year before. The capitals revealed minute traces of paint surviving upon the volutes. There is no doubt that the blocks had once formed part of a wall delimiting this section of the portico on the southeast. The structure, which this wall could have belonged to, remains outside the trench limits for now.

The pavement in this section was uncovered for a distance of about 5 m and a width of 4 m. Regular rows of flagstones (on average size: 0.52 x 0.30 m; 0.40 x 0.29 m; 0.70 x 0.31 m, etc.) were arranged longitudinally. Cutting across the corner at an angle, from southwest to northeast, was a course of single slabs (0.70 x 0.34; 0.50 x 0.35 m on average). This was likely the covering of a canal.

In the area behind the back wall of the east portico a large structure paved with flagstones was identified (cf. Figs. 14, 15). The excavated section, including the area uncovered in the previous season, now measures 12.30 m (E-W) and at least 12 m (N-S) (the eastern and southern extremities have yet to be investigated). The structure may have been entered from the eastern portico, although all traces of an entrance seem to have been destroyed. The surviving section of the back wall of the portico is identical in construction with the wall delimiting the structure on the north. This latter wall has been uncovered along a distance of 12 m and apparently continues further eastward. It was made of regular blocks of limestone, all 0.28 m wide, their length being on average c. 0.55; 0.50; 0.60 m etc.; it now stands no higher than c. 0.60 m. Inside the structure a low stylobate, 0.60 m wide, running parallel to the north wall created a portico 1.90 m wide. A row of columns oriented E-W was set up on this stylobate. With four columns of this row already discovered, it can be said that the average diameter of the column is 0.40 m and the space between each two columns measures 2.20 m. Another row of columns sided the west end of this structure; two columns have been preserved (including the corner one), spaced 2.15 m, standing 2.25 m away from the back wall of the portico. There may have been two more columns in this row. Taken together, these two rows appear to have once formed part of a large peristyle court. A third portico lining the southern side of the structure is likely, but further explorations are necessary to prove this. Blocks of the portico architrave, once

9) For the previous work in this area, see W.A. Daszewski, *PAM* XIII, op. cit., 81-86.

supported on the columns, have been found scattered all over the floor. Most of them bear stonecutter markings in the form of letters of the Greek alphabet.

Mounted directly upon the pavement in the central space is a round structure consisting of a ring-shaped enclosure – not nearly half of it has survived, but it was once obviously circular to judge by minute traces of lime plaster on the floor. A single course of blocks remains, forming a wall 0.50-0.52 m thick. The reconstructed outer diameter of this enclosure is 2.90 m and it lies 5.40 m away from the western

wall of the room and 4.25 m away from the northern wall. This probable rotunda (?) of some kind appears to have been erected on the long (E-W) axis of the structure which must have been an open-air court lined with colonnades.

A sizable set of fragmentary indented glass beakers was found in the fill by the northern wall, trapped by the falling stones. The glass assemblage from this part of the court (?) included also other types of vessels, as well as pottery that could be ascribed to a 3rd-4th century horizon.

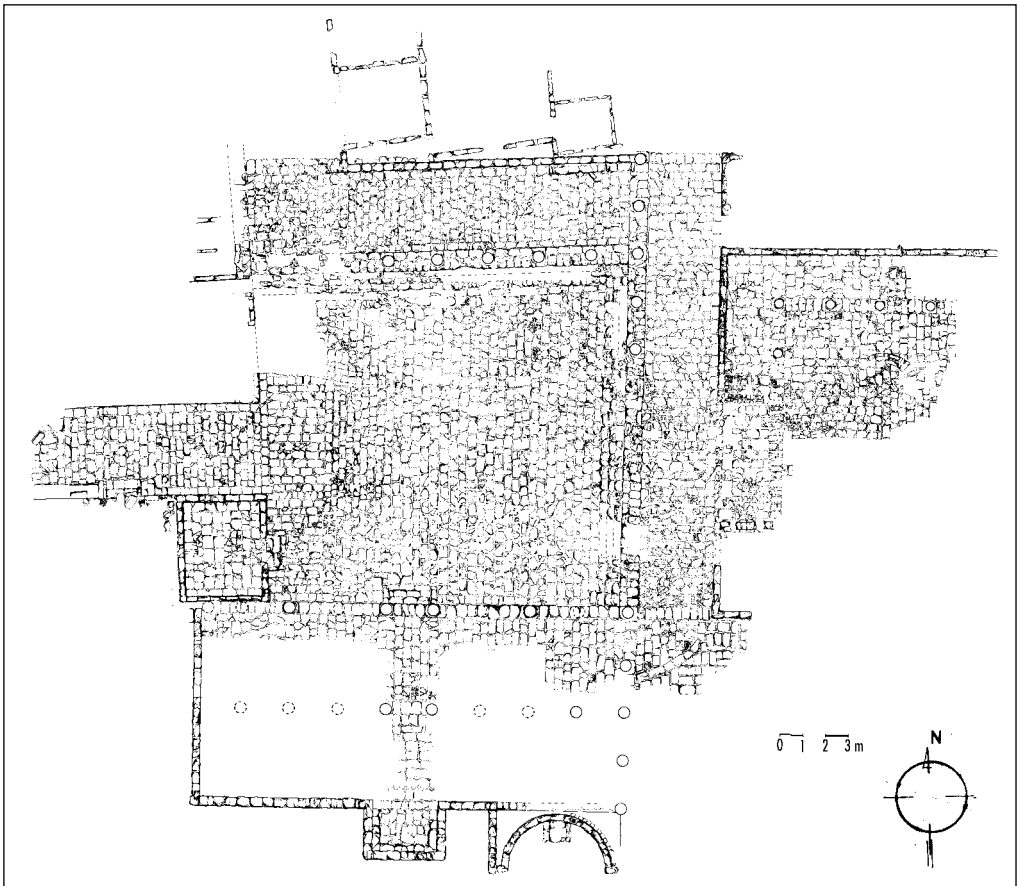


Fig. 14. Town center. Plan of the main square after excavations in seasons 2001-2002 (Drawing A. Błaszczuk)

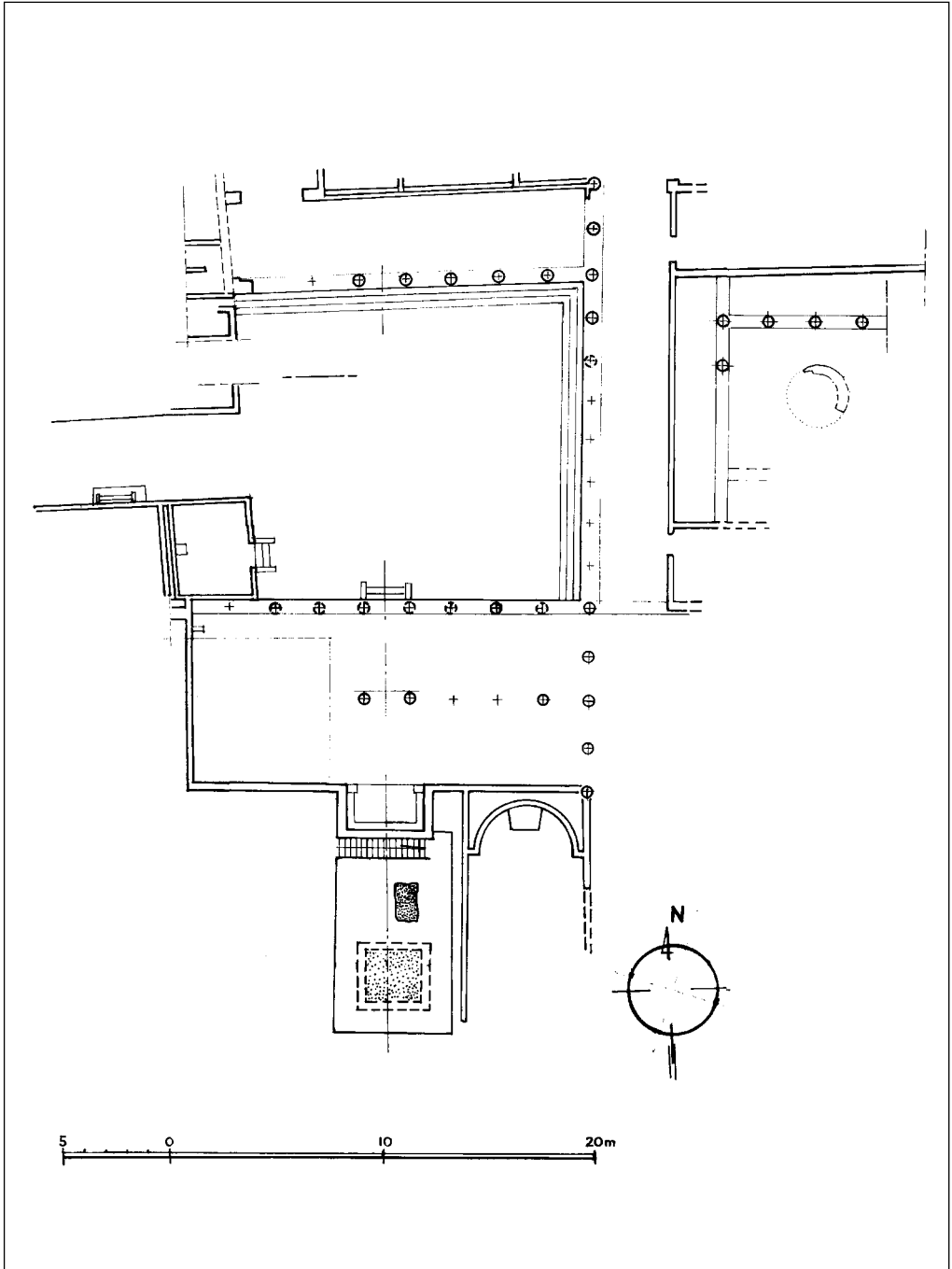


Fig. 15. Town Center. Schematic plan of buildings around the main square
(Drawing W. Kołtąj, updated by A. Błaszczuk)



Fig. 16. Town center. Collapsed wall in southeastern corner of main square, view from the northwest (Photo W.A. Daszewski)



Fig. 17. Main square. Column shaft with attached remains of plaster with fluting (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

The back wall of the east portico runs another 4.15 m to the north, encompassing a doorway measuring some 1.40 m in width. This is a mirror reflection of the wall and doorway discovered during the previous season immediately south of the presumed south corner of the colonnaded court (?). More indented glass beakers of the same kind as those found in the court were found under the collapsed blocks of the northern doorway.

Over on the western side of the main square, explorations continued in a broad sweep from the southwestern corner to a late E-W wall that had been observed in the northern part of the square during earlier work.¹⁰⁾

In the southwestern corner of this area, a large room, the eastern wall of which had

been uncovered last year, was now cleared in its entirety (*Fig. 18, cf. also 14, 15*). It measured 4.12 m (N-S) by 3.30 m (E-W) and was elevated c. 0.45 m with respect to the pavement of the main square. A set of three low steps situated slightly off axis in the east wall of the room ascended to the floor level. The walls of the room were preserved to the height of just one course of stone blocks (H. 0.37 m). Abutting the rear (west) wall of the room was a pedestal (L. 0.54; W. 0.52; H. 0.29 m) consisting of two large blocks. It may have been used as a statue base and the room itself could have served the purposes of veneration (sanctuary ?).

Further clearing of the pavement of the square to the north and west revealed intact flagging with obvious evidence of seismic-related dislocation of the flag-



Fig. 18. Main square. Southwestern room with base (sanctuary ?); note the seismic-related dislocation of the flagstones running across the square (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

10) *Ibid.*, 86.

stones running in a generally northwestern direction. A late wall of blocks mounted on sand extended generally eastward into the square. Between the room with pedestal and this wall traces of a late occupational level were observed some 0.65 m above the general level of the square (*Fig. 19*). The builders of this level had laid large regular slabs and smaller pebbles indiscriminately in a 30-40 cm thick bedding of rubble and sand, the general objective being to level the area. The evidence of pottery finds suggests a date even in the 5th century for this occupation. From this layer comes a damaged pendant carved of bone in the shape of a crouching rabbit (?).

Further clearing of the area north of the room with statue base brought to light a paved passage (street ?) 4 m wide, limited on either side (north and south) by walls of

stone blocks (*Figs. 14,15*). This season the passage was pursued west for a distance of some 10 m. Along the entire length of this passage (street), about 0.90 m away from the north wall, a serious dislocation fissure can be seen. This part of the pavement obviously subsided early on in the usage of the complex, possibly even in the late 2nd or 3rd century AD, as did presumably the entire northwestern part of the architecture encircling the square. The ancient inhabitants of this town filled the dislocation with a 5-to-30 cm thick layer of mortar, thus creating a fairly even, if somewhat sloping level (at the deepest point the dislocation is 0.5 m below the level of the paving in the passage).

The north wall delimiting this passage was preserved to a height of ca. 0.80 m (flush with the late level) and it presents



Fig. 19. Main square. West passage and the north delimiting wall. Accumulated layers above the subsided part of the pavement, including a late 5th-century level on top (Photo W.A. Daszewski)

a continuous plastered face concealing semi-dressed blocks of stone. The south wall, on the other hand, appears to be a continuation of the north wall of the room (sanctuary) with base. It, too, seems to run unbroken except for a doorway that is pierced in it some 1.50 m west of the west end of the room with base. This

doorway, measured with the jambs, is 1.60 m wide (1.30 m without the jambs) and is reached via a set of two steps between lateral walls. It was found blocked and must have gone out of use when the late level in the passage was introduced. The nature of the structure to which this entrance led remains unclear for now.

SUMMARY

The excavations in 2002 revealed sufficient evidence for alterations being made in the architecture of the square sometime in the late Roman period. The original square and colonnaded porticoes dated from the early 1st century AD (*Fig. 20*). Some destruction

and sinking of the ground, presumably in effect of seismic movements, caused parts of it to be walled up, altered or abandoned altogether. Pottery of the late 4th and the 5th century appears to suggest the time when this could have occurred.

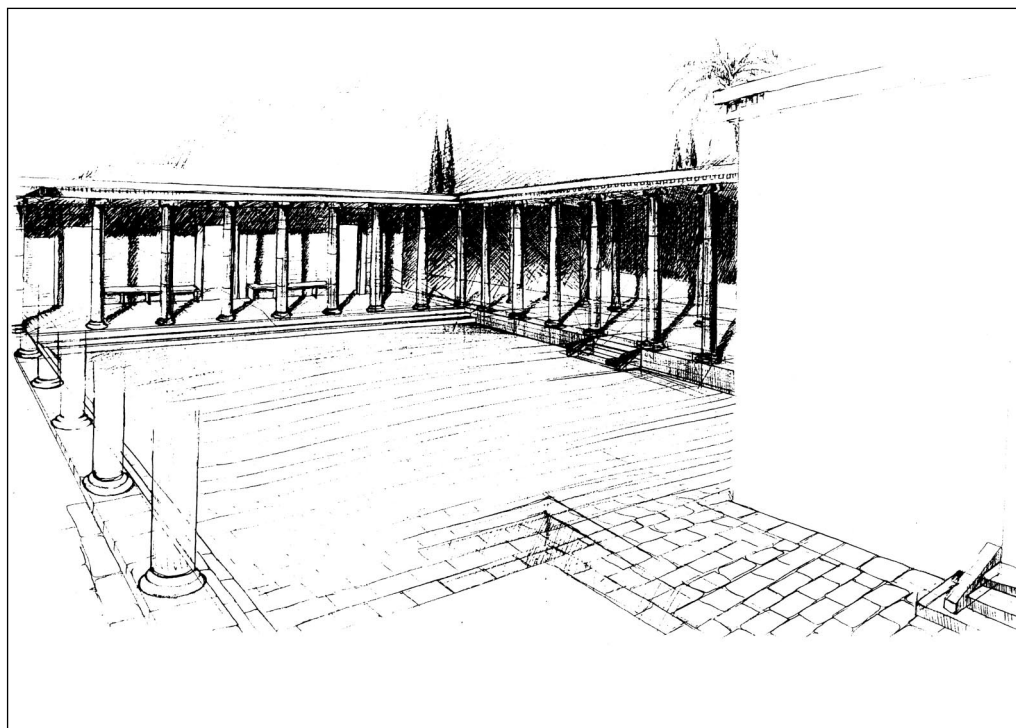


Fig. 20. Town center. Schematic view from the west of the main square surrounded by colonnaded porticoes and the southwest room (sanctuary ?) as it would have looked in the 1st century AD (Drawing W.A. Daszewski & A. Błaszczuk)